

The Stamps of Canada, Chapter II

Based on a Mekeel's Weekly Publication by B. W. H. Poole, with images added

Chapter II.—A Postmaster's Provisional.

Postage stamps were first placed on sale to the public in Canada on April 23rd, 1851, as we shall show later, but, according to an interesting article which appeared in the *London Philatelist* for June, 1904, it seems possible that at least one postmaster anticipated events slightly by issuing a stamped envelope of his own shortly before the regular governmental stamps were ready. It will perhaps simplify matters to reproduce the article in its original form, viz.:—

Canada: Hand-Stamped 3d Envelope of 1851.



The unique envelope, Sc. 1X1, not valued by Scott

We are indebted to Mr. E. B. Greenshields, of Montreal, for the following very interesting information:—

The following facts may be of interest to collectors of the stamps of British North America. Some time ago a cover was offered to me, which seemed to me to be absolutely genuine, yet I had never, up to that time, heard of such envelopes being in existence. This letter was posted in New Carlisle, Gaspé, Lower Canada, on April 7th, 1851, and was stamped "Three Pence" in two lines, inside a square, with a black border of neat design around the sides. Across this was written, "Letter R. W. Kelly Apl. 1851". The letter was addressed to Toronto, C. W., and on the other side was stamped the date the letter was received, "Apl. 16 1851". I sent the envelope to Mr. Donald A. King, of Halifax, and received the following reply from him:—

Halifax, N. S., February 22nd, 1904.

"Dear Sir,—I have yours of 19th inst. with cover, and am much obliged for your kindness in permitting me to have a look at it. It is new to me. I have no doubt it is absolutely genuine, and probably was made by the Postmaster at New Carlisle to save trouble in stamping the letter '3d' as was then the custom. It is just possible that the writer (whose name appears to be endorsed on the envelope) was the Postmaster there. A reference to the Postmaster-General's report for that year would give his name. As far as my memory serves me, the Canadian stamps were not then in issue, though an advance circular may have been sent out. I have shown the cover to a friend of mine who is an expert in typography, and he assures me that the printing is as old as dated, and that such type and border could not be procured now at any cost.... As to the value of your cover, it is impossible for me to say, but very considerable to any collector of British North America.

"Yours faithfully,
"Donald A. King."

Following up the clue given to me by Mr. King, I wrote to the Post Office Department at Ottawa, and received the following answer:—

Ottawa, 2nd March, 1904.

"Sir,—I am directed to acknowledge receipt of your communication...and in reply am directed to inform you that R. W. Kelly...was

Postmaster of New Carlisle in 1851....He appears to have been Postmaster from 1851 until his resignation on the 9th April, 1855.

"As regards your inquiry as to whether postage stamps were used on the 7th April, 1851, and your statement that you have an envelope sent on that date from New Carlisle to Toronto with 'Three Pence' printed on it, inside a fancy border, I have to say that postage stamps were issued to the public for the first time on the 23rd April, 1851, and that stamped envelopes were not issued until some years later. The stamped envelope to which you refer may have been an envelope so stamped on the prepayment in the New Carlisle Post Office, of three pence, the required charge for postage.

"William Smith, Secretary."

It will be noted from the conclusion of this letter that, according to the department at Ottawa, one might infer that the use of such a stamp would not be irregular. This is confirmed by the following extract from a reply to a letter a friend of mine wrote to Ottawa at my request:—

Ottawa, March 2nd, 1904.

"I took those questions of Mr. Greenshields over to Mr. — of the Post Office Department. He tells me that before the first issue of stamps, which took place on the 23rd of April, 1851, each Postmaster had a steel stamp which he used to mark the amount prepaid on the letter. These stamps were of different patterns, and it is probably the impression of one of them that appears on Mr. Greenshield's envelope. In some of the smaller post-offices they continued to use these stamps as late as 1875. It is rather a singular coincidence that if the inquiry had been, regarding the position of Postmaster, more than one day earlier, the Canadian records would not have shown whether the man named had held office or not, the reason being that it was on the 6th of April, 1851, that the Post Office Department was transferred from the Imperial Government, and all records prior to that date are in the possession of the Imperial authorities."

It seems strange that more of these covers have not been found. Such well-known authorities on the stamps of British North America as Mr. Lachlan Gibb and Mr. William Patterson, of Montreal, and Mr. Donald A. King, of Halifax, had not seen any until I consulted them about this one. I think it is very interesting to hear of a stamped envelope like this being used by the Post Office just before the issue of postage stamps.

So far as we have been able to find out the above constitutes all that has been published regarding this envelope. We can find no further mention of it in the columns of the *London Philatelist* or of any other journal published since 1904 nor does Mr. Howes so much as refers to it in his recently published monograph on Canada's postal issues. Yet, on the face of it, the matter seems one worthy of extended investigation by some Canada specialist or other. Its history is similar in many respects to the history of many of the much sought after Postmaster's provisional stamps of the United States and there is a possibility that this envelope may represent a legitimate postmaster's provisional.